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Comment

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This year marks the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses, inaugurating commemorations around the world, from joint Lutheran-Catholic statements to a Luther Playmobile figurine. Marking the anniversary with many, this issue of the *Quarterly* features articles on the Reformers' reading of Scripture by two specialists in the history of interpretation.

G. Sujin Pak, assistant professor of the history of Christianity at Duke Divinity School, reflects on the Reformers' affirmation of Scripture's perspicuity, establishing how it relates to their core commitments to Scripture's prime authority and justification by grace through faith, and its implications for the church's role in scriptural interpretation. Throughout her account, she distinguishes the Reformers' commitment to Scripture's clarity from contemporary misunderstandings in which perspicuity ascribes authoritative interpretation to every individual interpreter on every point of Scripture—and removes interpretive authority from the church. Against these she renders the Reformers' insistence on God as the sole authoritative interpreter, their limitation of Scripture's perspicuity to its soteriological content, and their affirming the continued interpretive role of the church, in submission to Scripture itself.

Stephen J. Chester, professor of New Testament at North Park Theological Seminary, asks what use contemporary interpreters of Paul may make of the Reformers' Pauline interpretation. Against wholesale acceptance or rejection, Chester advocates for—and offers—a more critical engagement that differentiates between aspects of Reformation readings of Paul that contemporary interpreters understand and rightly reject, those they simply misunderstand, and those that are over-emphasized to the neglect of equally important themes, resulting in a false portrait.

He concludes by suggesting avenues for fresh interpretation opened by the Reformers, including a retrieval of the believer's union with Christ, correcting a perceived imbalance on merely extrinsic justification.

The sixteenth-century Reformers called the church *ad fontes*—back to Scripture and its patristics interpreters as the pure fountainhead of Christianity, over and against what they saw as later corruptions. Pak and Chester do the same with respect to the Reformers themselves. Their articles return to the sources, separating the Reformers' thought from subsequent construals of it—whether the New Perspective's portrayal of their Pauline interpretation or contemporary misunderstanding of their affirmation of Scripture's perspicuity.

I suspect commemorating Luther's gospel with a toy in his likeness would scandalize the man Pak quotes as saying, "Would to God that my exposition and that of all doctors might perish….[L]et my exposition and that of all doctors be no more than a scaffold, an aid for the construction of the true building, so that we may ourselves grasp and taste the pure and simple Word of God and abide by it" (LW 52:286). Research such as of that of Pak and Chester, that enables us to better see Scripture and its gospel as the Reformers did, provides a fitting commemoration.

The Perspicuity of Scripture, Justification by Faith Alone, and the Role of the Church in Reading Scripture with the Protestant Reformers

G. Sujin Pak, assistant professor of the history of Christianity, Duke Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina

As we commemorate the 500th anniversary of the publication of Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses in Wittenberg, it is natural to reflect on the many important legacies of the Protestant Reformations of the sixteenth century. Among several legacies that could be identified, three rise to prominence in my own reflections: the Protestant Reformers' assertions of the prime authority of Scripture, justification by faith alone, and the perspicuity of Scripture. Certainly, these three assertions have been the subject of numerous scholarly publications. Yet such studies frequently overlook the deep and intimate connection between these crucial teachings of the Protestant Reformers. They function as natural corollaries to one another and together embody the theological core of the Reformers' message, particularly that of Martin Luther and John Calvin. Indeed, what perspicuity of Scripture has come to mean in contemporary usage differs in several important respects from the Protestant Reformers' meaning and purposes when they steadfastly insisted on Scripture's clarity. It is a helpful exercise, then, to revisit what Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin meant by the perspicuity of Scripture, how it functioned, and the goals it served. First, the Reformers' affirmation of the perspicuity of Scripture was a crucial tenet of their assertion of Scripture's prime authority and their challenge to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Furthermore, the Reformers grounded Scripture's authority and clarity on the biblical principle of justification by faith alone as the very perspicuous heart of Scripture and as a principle

that reinforces Scripture as self-authenticating and self-interpreting. We might more accurately understand the Protestant Reformers' teachings on the perspicuity of Scripture if we understand its deep foundations in the principle of justification by faith alone. Yet even as the Protestant Reformers displaced church authority in favor of the prime authority of Scripture, this did not mean that they stripped the church of all authority concerning matters of Scripture's interpretation. Rather they strongly affirmed the authority of the church insofar as it acts under the guiding rule of Scripture.

Assertions of the Authority, Accessibility, and Perspicuity of Scripture

In many respects, Luther's reformation began with a profound challenge to papal authority specifically and church authority more generally. As early as the Ninety-Five Theses in 1517, Luther argued that authority belongs to God alone and that the gospel revealed in Scripture is the true "treasure" of the church and the primary means through which God reveals and communicates God's will.[1] By the 1520s, Luther launched a full-scale attack on the authority of the Roman Catholic Church that included not only assertions of the prime authority of Scripture but also the insistence on Scripture's accessibility to all baptized believers. Indeed, in his 1520 appeal to the German nobility, Luther intentionally addressed his exhortations to the laity because he was becoming increasingly convinced of the current ecclesial establishment's intransigence.[2] In this appeal, Luther attacked the claim that only the pope and those of the "spiritual estate" (i.e., the clergy) may interpret Scripture authoritatively for the church. Rather, all Christians by virtue of their baptism are consecrated priests, counted among the spiritual estate, and called to interpret and proclaim God's Word.[3] Moreover, the teachings of any Christian, including the pope, are subject to the measure of the true and

1. See especially theses 6, 25–28, 53–55, and 62 in *Luther's Works*, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–86) and ed. Helmut T. Lehman (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955–86) [hereafter "LW"], 31:26, 27–28, 30; *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 72 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau: 1883–2007) [hereafter "WA"], 1:233, 234, 236.

2. Luther wrote, "I am carrying out our intention to put together a few points on the matter of the reform of the Christian estate to be laid before the Christian nobility of the German nation, since the clergy, to whom this task more properly belongs, have grown quite indifferent" (LW 44:123; WA 6:404).

3. Luther, LW 44:126, 127; WA 6:406, 407.

primary authority of Scripture.[4]

Similarly, in *The Misuse of the Mass* (1521), Luther insisted that a "real Christian knows that the church never ordains or institutes anything apart from the Word of God."[5] The true church—the true sheep of God—hear God's voice and follow God's Word (John 10:27). Thus, Luther continued, "It is not God's Word just because the church speaks it; rather, the church comes into being because God's Word is spoken. The church does not constitute the Word, but it is constituted by the Word."[6] In this way, Luther argued that God's Word is prior to the church—prior in both existence and authority. Accordingly, it cannot be the case that the authority of Scripture relies in any way on the consent and authority of the church. Rather, the church is brought into being by the Word of God; the church is built on the very foundation of Scripture as God's ordained and sufficient revelation. Indeed, Luther defined the church precisely by its relationship to this authoritative Word of God: the church is the community that hears and obeys the Word of God revealed in Scripture.[7]

Around this same time, Huldrych Zwingli made similar assertions concerning the prime authority of Scripture and its accessibility to all believers. Zwingli also defined the church as the community that hears and obeys the Word of God, writing, "Therefore, those who hear are God's sheep, are the church of God…for they follow the Word only of God."[8] Furthermore, Zwingli rejected the Roman Catholic Church's claim that only ordained priests could interpret Scripture authoritatively for the church. Rather, pointing to John 6:45 ("they shall all be taught by God"), he affirmed that any Christian through the gift of God's Spirit may be taught directly by God and so rightly interpret Scripture.[9] Alongside

4. Luther wrote, "When the pope acts contrary to the Scriptures, it is our duty to stand by the Scriptures, to reprove him and to constrain him, according to the word of Christ in Matthew 18" (LW 44:136; WA 6:413).

5. LW 36:144; WA 8:491.

6. LW 36:144–45; WA 8:491.

7. LW 36:144–45, 40:11, 41:150; WA 8:491–92, 12:173, 50:629–30.

8. Note that a definition of the church as the community who hears and obeys the Word of God assumes that Scripture is *prior to* the existence of the church. Zwingli, *Corpus Reformatorum* (Halle, Braunschweig, and Berlin, 1834–) [hereafter "CR"], 90:259; "Reply to Emser," in *Commentary on True and False Religion*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller (Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1981), 373.

9. Zwingli, CR 88:321, 366; *Archeteles,* in *Ulrich Zwingli: Early Writings*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1987), 283–84; and *Of the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God,* in *Zwingli and Bullinger: Selected Translations*, Library of

their arguments that any baptized Christian has what he or she needs to read Scripture rightly (i.e., faith and the Holy Spirit), Luther and Zwingli declared the principle of Scripture's perspicuity. For example, in his 1520 response to Pope Leo X's papal bull censoring his writings, Luther wrote that Scripture is "in and of itself the most certain, the most accessible, the most clear thing of all, interpreting itself, approving and judging and illuminating all things."[10] Zwingli followed his own assertions of the call on all Christians to interpret Scripture with the sermon *Of the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God,* in which he argued that the gifts of faith and the Holy Spirit not only make Scripture accessible to all, but are the source of its clarity.[11]

John Calvin soundly affirmed Scripture's prime authority and carefully clarified what he believed to be the proper relationship between Scripture and the church. Calvin wrote, "But a most pernicious error widely prevails that Scripture has only so much weight as is conceded to it by the consent of the church—as if the eternal and inviolable truth of God depended on human decisions!"[12] Here Calvin cuts right to the core of the problem from the perspective of the Protestant Reformers: to subsume Scripture under the authority of the church is equivalent to placing it under a form of human authority rather than retaining its rightful place under divine authority alone. Similarly, Luther had already insisted that there is an irreconcilable conflict between human doctrines and Scripture.[13] Like Luther and Zwingli, Calvin coupled the assertion of Scripture's prime authority with an affirmation of its perspicuity, writing, "Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their color or sweet and bitter things do of their taste."[14] Yet here he pointed to the essential work of the Holy Spirit in

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Christian Classics, vol. 24, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 79. Cf. CR 90:262; "Reply to Emser," 375–77.

10. Luther, WA 7:97, as translated by Mark D. Thompson, "Biblical Interpretation in the Works of Martin Luther," in *History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 2, *The Medieval through the Reformation Periods*, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 303.

11. Zwingli, CR 88:342–84; *Clarity and Certainty*, 59–94.

12. Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.1.

13. In his 1522 treatise *Avoiding the Doctrines of Men*, Luther wrote, "We hope that everyone will agree with the decision that the doctrines of men must be forsaken and the Scriptures retained, for they will neither desire nor be able to keep both, since the two cannot be reconciled and are by nature necessarily opposed to one another, like fire and water, like heaven and earth" (LW 35:153; WA 10/2:91).

14. Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.2.

establishing the authority of Scripture as a necessary prerequisite to its clarity. The Holy Spirit promotes Scripture's clarity, but only after it *first* establishes Scripture's authority and certainty in the hearts of believers.[15] Calvin explained that only "those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught" can affirm Scripture's authority, recognize that Scripture is self-authenticating, and thereby be certain of its truth.[16] Hence he asserted, "Therefore, illumined by [the Spirit's] power, we believe neither by our own nor by anyone else's judgment that Scripture is from God; but above human judgment we affirm with utter certainty that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of [humans]."[17] Calvin's crucial point is that only God can authenticate God's self; only the Spirit of God can authenticate God's Word revealed in Scripture. No human testimonies or proofs from reason will ever be sufficient to establish Scripture's authority and certainty, even as the revelation of Scripture came—as Calvin so paradoxically states it—"from the very mouth of God through the ministry of [humans]."[18]

Scripture's Authority and Perspicuity and the Mutual Bond of Word and Spirit

In the first instance, the Protestant Reformers' insistence that Scripture is self-authenticating and self-interpreting served to establish that Scripture is in no way reliant on human authority, judgment, or consent—including that of the church. Furthermore, dismantling the authority of the Roman Catholic Church entailed dismantling what the Protestant Reformers viewed as its "tyranny" over Scripture. The Reformers aimed to "free" Scripture from all forms of human tyranny, first among them the Roman Church's claim that biblical interpretation belongs in the hands of the clergy and the pope above all. Since Scripture belongs rightly to

15. This was basically what Luther and Zwingli affirmed as well when they asserted that the gifts of faith and the Holy Spirit are necessary prior gifts before Scripture can be accessible and clear.

16. Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.5. Calvin affirmed earlier, "For God alone is a fit witness of God's self in God's Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in human hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what has been divinely commanded" (*Institutes* 1.7.4, adjusted for inclusive language).

17. Ibid. 1.7.5.

18. Ibid. 1.8.13. Thus Calvin declared, "But those who wish to prove to unbelievers that Scripture is the Word of God are acting foolishly, for only by faith can this be known" (1.8.13).

the domain of God—the domain of the Spirit—and is not at all under human dominion, it followed that any Christian with the gift of God's Spirit can interpret Scripture faithfully for the church and that, by virtue of the aid of the Holy Spirit, Scripture is clear. Yet, by affirming Scripture's clarity and accessibility, the Protestant Reformers in no way intended to subject Scripture to personal whims of interpretation. Nonetheless, one of the possible outcomes of their assertions was that any Christian might claim to have the Holy Spirit and champion their own individual interpretations of Scripture, thus leading to the possibility of Scripture's being subjected to a plethora of individual, personal impulses.

Indeed, radical groups arising in the mid- to late-1520s advanced claims of the Holy Spirit's guiding work in directions contrary to Luther and Zwingli's original intentions. Certain leaders among these emerging Spiritualist and Anabaptist groups upheld the necessity of new, ongoing revelation through the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit beyond, and even apart from, Scripture. For example, near Wittenberg the radical leader Thomas Müntzer argued for the necessity of new, ongoing revelation from the Holy Spirit in order to judge and discern right teaching. He contrasted the "living Word of God" with the "dead letter" of Scripture. He contended that not only is the aid of the Holy Spirit necessary to clarify Scripture, but new revelation from the Spirit is necessary for Scripture to continue to be an ongoing, *living* Word.[19] Similarly, some Anabaptist groups developed in the region of Zurich that claimed direct, new revelation from the Holy Spirit, such as the Anabaptists of Zollikon and Gallen.[20] Consequently, such assertions undermined the Protestant Reformers' insistence on Scripture as a sufficient and final revelation—an insistence central to establishing Scripture's authority.

Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin responded to the challenges of the radicals in two key ways. First, they insisted that since the Spirit is the breath of God's Word and the very author of Scripture, it cannot speak contrary

19. "Müntzer's Letter to Melanchthon, 29 March 1522," in *The Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer*, ed. and trans. Peter Matheson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 44, 46; "The Prague Manifesto" in ibid., 359; and "A Protestation Concerning the Situation in Bohemia," in ibid., 365. Gregory Kane describes Müntzer as insisting that "the Bible, although the Word of God, was a Word of the past that needed actualization through a new Word of the Spirit," "The Exercise of Prophecy in the Early Reformation," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 33 (2013): 30.

20. For more information on these groups, see C. Arnold Snyder, "The Birth and Evolution of Anabaptism (1520–1530)," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 80, no. 4 (2006): 501–645, particularly 540–41 and 591–94.

to God's Word revealed in Scripture. Indeed, one discerns the true Spirit of God from false spirits precisely by the Spirit's consensus with God's Word revealed in Scripture—a consensus that is a consensus with the Spirit's own self as the author of Scripture. Second, the Reformers more strongly asserted and clarified the proper guiding role of the church in the interpretation of Scripture, to which the last section of this article turns. Thus Luther aimed the following words in the 1537 Smalcald Articles against these radicals: "God gives no one his Spirit or grace except through and with the external Word that comes before. Thus we shall be protected from [those] who boast that they possess the Spirit without or before the Word and who therefore judge, interpret, and twist the Scriptures according to their pleasure."[21] Luther thereby insisted that the Spirit only rightly comes through the work of the external Word of God in Scripture; only those who adhere to Scripture rightly possess the Holy Spirit.

Likewise, Calvin maintained that the Spirit of God never utters new revelations or invents new doctrines; rather, one discerns the true Spirit of God precisely by its consensus with Scripture.[22] Thus Calvin warned, "But lest under the Spirit's sign the spirit of Satan should creep in, the Spirit would have us recognize him in his own image that is stamped upon the Scriptures. The Spirit is the author of the Scriptures and cannot vary or differ from himself. Hence, the Spirit must remain just as he once revealed himself there."[23] Accordingly, Calvin pointed to the mutual bond between the Holy Spirit and Scripture: "the Holy Spirit so inheres in his truth that he expresses in Scripture that only when proper reverence and dignity are given to the Word does the Holy Spirit show forth his power…for by a kind of mutual bond, the Lord joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit."[24] One might rightly point out, however, that such an insistence on the inseparable and mutual bond of the Holy Spirit and God's Word does not sufficiently address the potential problem of the plethora of biblical interpretations stemming from those who appeal to the guidance of the Holy Spirit to undergird their own individual readings of Scripture. Here, elucidating the ways in which the Reformers grounded Scripture's authority and clarity on the biblical principle of justification by faith alone proves instructive.

21. *The Book of Concord*, ed. T.G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959), 312.
22. Calvin, *Institutes* 1.9.1–2.
23. Ibid. 1.9.2.
24. Ibid. 1.9.3.

Justification by Faith Alone and Scripture's Authority

One of the crucial aims of the Protestant Reformers was to establish the prime authority of Scripture and to remove it from subjection to any form of human authority. In this light, affirming Scripture's clarity and accessibility could never entail a larger array of persons claiming to have the singular, authoritative reading of Scripture by virtue of the Holy Spirit. Such a result would actually multiply the initial problem. Rather than just the ordained leadership of the church making this claim, any Christian could make it—in effect placing Scripture under innumerable human-based authorities! That this may very well be the assumption in many Protestant churches today makes it all the more important to understand what the Protestant Reformers advocated and how they thought one should practice faithful interpretation of Scripture. Their point was not that any person, even any Christian, has what they need to interpret Scripture in and of their own ability. More specifically, the Reformers' point was not that by the gift of faith and the Holy Spirit one's *own abilities* were purified and empowered. Rather, their very point was that Scripture is clear and accessible *not* by virtue of any human efforts or abilities, even sanctified abilities, but *solely* by virtue of the gift of faith through the work of the Spirit—precisely the gift of faith given when one is justified by faith alone. Just as the Protestant Reformers affirmed that *only God* can initiate faith and do the work of salvation in a person, so also they insisted that *only God* is the actor in any true interpretation of Scripture. Just as the human must despair of making any contribution to her salvation, so Luther insisted that to interpret Scripture rightly one must despair completely of one's own intelligence and ability.[25] This was what the Protestant Reformers meant when they asserted that Scripture is self-interpreting. This claim did not simply affirm that passages in Scripture clarify and interpret other passages of Scripture; it was equally a profound assertion of the Triune God as the only true interpreter of Scripture.

25. Luther wrote, "[T]he Holy Scriptures constitute a book that turns the wisdom of all other books into foolishness….Therefore, you should straightway despair of your reason and understanding" (LW 34:285; WA 50:659). Likewise, he wrote to George Spalatin, "No one can enter into Scripture by study or innate intelligence…you must completely despair of your own diligence and intelligence and rely solely on the infusion of the Spirit" (LW 48:53–54; *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtasgabe, Briefwechsel*, 18 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1930–85) [hereafter "WABR"], 1:133–34.

For instance, Luther appealed to David's example concerning how to approach Scripture faithfully:

> Thus you see how David keeps praying in Psalm 119, "Teach me, Lord, instruct me, lead me, show me," and many more words like these. Although he knew well and daily heard and read the text of Moses and other books besides, still he wants to lay hold of the real teacher of the Scriptures so that he may not seize upon them pell-mell with his reason and become his own teacher, for such practice gives rise to factious spirits who allow themselves to nurture the delusion that the Scriptures are subject to them and can be easily grasped with their reason.[26]

For Luther, keeping central an understanding of self as sinner and God as the sole actor in the work of justification means one must constantly resist resorting to one's own abilities—especially to reason—lest one go back to being one's own teacher or looking to other human teachers, particularly in the activity of interpreting Scripture.[27] When one keeps front and center the principle of justification by God's gift of faith alone—thereby having a right understanding of self as sinner entirely reliant on the gracious action of God—then one rightly perceives that God is the true actor in and through Scripture; the Holy Spirit is the only true interpreter. Thus Luther proclaimed, "The Holy Spirit must be the Teacher and Guide. Since [the Spirit] reaches [humans] only through faith in Christ, whereas the works-righteous reject faith and retain the Law, it is impossible for them" to "kiss the Son"—that is, to

26. Luther, LW 34:286; WA 50:659. Modern definitions of Scripture's perspicuity that emphasize a role of human reason depart from the early Protestant Reformers' views. Keith Stanglin insightfully depicts this transition in modernity toward optimistic views of the role of reason in Scripture's perspicuity in "The Rise and Fall of Biblical Perspicuity: Remonstrants and the Transition toward Modern Exegesis," *Church History* 83, no. 1 (2014): 38–59.

27. Against Emser, Luther insisted that Scripture stands alone and that God should be the sole interpreter of Scripture; hence, one should not rely too heavily on the church fathers' interpretations: "One should not use the fathers' teachings for anything more than to get into Scripture as they did, and then one should remain with Scripture alone. But Emser thinks that they should have a special function alongside the Scriptures, as if Scripture were not enough for teaching us" (LW 39:167; WA 7:641). Luther wrote just prior, "God's sayings stand alone and need no human interpretation" (LW 39:165; WA 7:639).

worship God rightly or, for that matter, to interpret Scripture rightly.[28] Luther's insistence on God's Spirit as the true interpreter of Scripture, and his refutation of reliance on reason and human exposition, included a rejection of his own attempts at biblical interpretation as any kind of sufficient, authoritative guide. In his 1520 response to Pope Leo X's papal bull, he wrote, "I do not desire to be honored as one more learned than all, but Scripture alone to rule: to be interpreted neither by my spirit nor any human spirit, but understood through itself and by its own Spirit."[29] He echoed this at the conclusion of his 1522 sermon on Matthew 2:1–2: "Would to God that my exposition and that of all doctors might perish.... [L]et my exposition and that of all doctors be no more than a scaffold, an aid for the construction of the true building, so that we may ourselves grasp and taste the pure and simple Word of God and abide by it."[30]

Moreover, Luther's immediate response to the unrest in Wittenberg in the late 1520s, caused by radical teachings, was to return to Wittenberg and proclaim a series of eight sermons that specifically emphasized God's Word as a living and active Word that is the only real agent of any true reform. In the second of these 1522 sermons, Luther preached,

> God's Word should be allowed to work alone without our work or interference. Why? Because it is not in my power or hand to fashion [human] hearts as the potter molds the clay and fashion them at my pleasure. I can get no farther than their ears; their hearts I cannot reach. And since I cannot pour faith into their hearts, I cannot, nor should I, force anyone to have faith. That is the work of God alone, who causes faith to live in the heart. Therefore, we should give free course to the Word and not add our works to it. We have the *jus verbi* [the right to speak] but not the *executio* [power to accomplish]. We should preach the Word, but the results must be left solely to God's good pleasure.[31]

Luther thereby connected the principle of justification by faith alone directly with the prime authority of Scripture and the assertion of God's

28. Luther, LW 12:87; WA 40/2:304.

29. Luther, WA 7:98–99, as translated by Mark D. Thompson, "Biblical Interpretation in the Works of Martin Luther," in *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 2, *The Medieval through the Reformation Periods*, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 304.

30. LW 52:286; WA 10/2:728.

31. LW 51:76; WA 10/3:15.

Word as the only actor that can accomplish the true applications and fruits of God's Word. He clarified that though any Christian has the right to *proclaim* God's Word (i.e., the priesthood of all believers), God alone has the power to *accomplish* what God intends in and through its proclamation. These fruits belong solely and ultimately in the hands of God. This, in essence, disciplines all human attempts to interpret Scripture, so that one must wait and see whether and how God acts in and through a proposed interpretation to accomplish *God's* purposes.

Similarly, Calvin asserted that the effectiveness of God's Word in Scripture relies completely and solely on the work of the Holy Spirit. He maintained, "The Word of God is like the sun shining upon all those to whom it is proclaimed, but with no effect among the blind. Now, all of us are blind by nature in this respect. Accordingly, it cannot penetrate into our minds unless the Spirit, as the inner teacher, through his illumination makes entry for it."[32] Calvin thereby pointed both to the Holy Spirit as the true interpreter of Scripture and to the necessity of the Holy Spirit for Scripture's meaning and intent to take effect and/or have authority in the lives and hearts of believers.[33] Furthermore, he argued that "faith is the principle work of the Holy Spirit," for "the Spirit is the inner teacher by whose effort the promise of salvation penetrates into our minds, a promise that would otherwise only strike the air and beat upon our ears."[34] Consequently, Calvin also connected the principle of justification by faith alone with the recognition of Scripture's prime authority and self-interpreting character, in which the Holy Spirit is the only true agent who can effect God's purposes.

Justification by Faith Alone and Scripture's Perspicuity

For Luther and Calvin, the principle of justification by faith alone undergirds the authority and effectiveness of Scripture in the believer's life. Given that the human makes no contribution to his or her salvation, given that salvation is dependent on faith and the Holy Spirit as one hundred percent God's gift, given that the affirmation of Scripture's authority and Scripture's fruit-bearing effects require this gift of faith and the

32. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.2.34.

33. Likewise Calvin wrote, "So also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts unless it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit" (*Institutes* 1.7.4); and "the sun rises upon the earth when God's Word shines upon men; but they do not have its benefit until he who is called the 'Father of lights' either gives eyes or opens them. For where the Spirit does not cast his light, all is darkness" (*Institutes* 2.2.21).

34. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.1.4

Holy Spirit, and given that the Holy Spirit is the only true interpreter of Scripture, it follows that the principle of justification by faith alone also undergirds and informs the Protestant Reformers' assertions of Scripture's perspicuity. Scripture is clear solely because of *God's* actions—because of God's gift of faith and the Holy Spirit to the believer. Scripture is clear only through the effective working of justification by faith alone in the life of the believer.[35] The Protestant Reformers established the prime authority of Scripture above and beyond any form of human authority while maintaining the rightful place of the priesthood of all believers (i.e., Scripture's accessibility and clarity). Moreover, they delineated the proper bounds of human activity, for God alone performs and effects the clarity and fruits of God's Word. It should come as no surprise, then, that the assertions of Scripture's authority and perspicuity figured prominently in Luther's argument with Erasmus over whether the human will is in bondage or free.

For Luther, the key issues of justification by faith alone and Scripture's authority and perspicuity were at the heart of his debate with Erasmus over the human will. Erasmus began his 1524 treatise on the freedom of the will with a statement of his dislike of assertions (in direct reproof of Luther's earlier *Assertio* that denounced Pope Leo X's papal bull). He contended that some parts of Scripture are obscure, among which he reckoned the matter of the freedom or bondage of the human will. Thus, Luther's assertion of the total bondage of the human will is a dangerous assertion on an ambiguous subject that opens a "window to impiety."[36] Rather, it is truer to say that Scripture is obscure on this matter, for arguments from Scripture can be garnered to assert both a free and a bound will.[37] Consequently, Erasmus insisted that the authority of Scripture is not in dispute here, but "our battle is about the meaning of Scripture."[38]

35. Luther wrote, "No person perceives one iota of what is in the Scriptures unless he has the Spirit of God. All have a darkened heart, so that even if they can recite everything in Scripture and know how to quote it, yet they apprehend and truly understand nothing of it" (LW 33:28; WA 18:609). Similarly, according to Calvin, "Flesh is not capable of such lofty wisdom as to conceive God and what is God's unless it be illumined by the Spirit of God" (*Institutes* 2.2.19); "Without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Word can do nothing" (*Institutes* 3.2.33). Cf. *Institutes* 2.2.21, quoted in n. 33 above.

36. Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, ed. and trans. E. Gordon Rupp, Library of Christian Classics 17 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 37–41, 41.

37. Erasmus then recounted these opposing evidences from Scripture, yet with clear preference for the view of the freedom of the will. *Freedom of the Will*, 47–74.

38. Ibid., 43.

Moreover, he defined freedom of the will in this way: "By free choice in this place we mean a power of the human will by which a human may apply one's self to the things that lead to eternal salvation or turn away from them."[39] Ultimately, Erasmus maintained it is better to proffer (yet not "assert") that with the aid of God's grace—with the gift of faith and the aid of charity—the human will is healed enough to make a positive contribution to salvation; for Scripture supports this view, and this view better accounts for human culpability concerning sin.[40]

Noteworthy for our purposes here are the clear connections Erasmus drew between Scripture's obscurity, arguments for human free will (notably based on reason), and the definition of the human free will as one that still needs the aid of God's grace, but an aid that thereby empowers the human will to choose the good. Indeed, in Luther's view, each of these claims constituted a direct attack on the authority of Scripture, the perspicuous content of Scripture, and the doctrine of justification by faith alone as well as the exact connections between these. Luther conceded that "there are many texts in the Scriptures that are obscure," but he immediately insisted that these texts in "no way hinder a knowledge of the subject matter of Scripture."[41] Scripture's subject matter is clear and accessible, so much so that "when the thing signified is in the light, it does not matter if this or that sign is in darkness, since many other signs of the same thing are meanwhile in the light."[42] Luther identified the incarnation, Trinity, salvation in Christ, and Christ's eternal kingdom as the clear subject matter of Scripture.[43]

In his 1538 exposition of Psalm 51, Luther expounded on Scripture's clear soteriological subject matter: "The proper subject of theology is the human guilty of sin and condemned and God the Justifier and Savior of the human sinner.…All Scripture points to this…the God who justifies,

39. Ibid., 47.

40. Ibid., 49–50. Erasmus wrote, "And in these things, it is probable that there was a will in some way ready for the good but useless for eternal salvation without the addition of grace by faith.…Faith, therefore, cures reason, which has been wounded by sin, and charity bears onward the weak will," pp. 49, 50. He continued, "If the power to distinguish good and evil and the will of God has been hidden from humanity, it could not be imputed to them if they made the wrong choice. If the will had not been free, sin could not have been imputed," p. 50.

41. Luther, LW 33:25; WA 18:606.

42. LW 33:26; WA 18:606.

43. Luther identified the clear subject matter as "that Christ the Son of God has been made man, that God is three and one, that Christ suffered for us and is to reign eternally" (LW 33:26; WA 18:606).

repairs and makes alive and the human who fell from righteousness and life into sin and eternal death. Whoever follows this aim in reading the Holy Scriptures will read holy things fruitfully."[44] For Luther, all Scripture not only points to Christ, preaches Christ, and "drives Christ home," it precisely confesses the necessity of Christ's saving work in the principle of justification by faith alone.[45] Accordingly, the doctrine of justification by faith alone is a nonnegotiable component of the perspicuous content of Scripture. Thus, it cannot be the case that Scripture is obscure on the matter of the human will; its meaning is not up for negotiation (as if it were a matter of free will!). Rather, the clear, authoritative teaching of Scripture is that the human will is in bondage to sin and that salvation comes only through Christ's work of justification by faith alone—a work that is one hundred percent God's action and gift. Consequently, Scripture can never be obscure on this matter, for it is the whole purpose of God's provision of Scripture to reveal the true path of salvation: justification by faith alone. Nor can it be the case that the gift of faith empowers the human will and abilities; rather, Luther insisted on the constant return to the recognition of one's absolute dependence on God's gracious, saving action in Christ though the Holy Spirit's work of faith in the believer. Lastly, for Luther there is a direct connection between the insistence on God as the sole actor in justification and the insistence on God as the sole true interpreter of God's Word; together they substantiate

44. Luther, LW 12:311; WA 40/2:328. Several scholars point to the Protestant Reformers' principle of the "evangelical clarity" of Scripture, arguing that the "defense of Scripture's clarity was solely concerned with the accessibility of the evangelical message" and that the Protestant Reformers did not espouse an idea of Scripture's "plenary perspicuity." See James Patrick Callahan, "*Claritas Scripturae*: The Role of Perspicuity in Protestant Hermeneutics," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Studies* 39, no. 3 (1996): 359, 360; David J. Lose, "Luther and the Evangelical Clarity of Scripture and Sermon," *Lutheran Forum* 31, no. 4 (1997): 33; and Paul Brewster, "The Perspicuity of Scripture," *Faith and Mission* 22, no. 2 (2005): 27. Yet, these accounts tend to speak broadly of an "evangelical clarity" and stop short of its specific content in the doctrine of justification by faith alone, though James A. Nestingen very briefly points to this connection in "Biblical Clarity and Ambiguity in *The Bondage of the Will*," *Logia* 22, no. 1 (2013): 32. Erling T. Teigen and David Lose correctly argue that, contrary to Erasmus's dislike of assertions, Luther insists on the confessional, proclamatory, and propositional character of Scripture. See Teigen, "The Clarity of Scripture and Hermeneutical Principles in the Lutheran Confessions," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 42, nos. 2–3 (1982): 147–66. Lose, "Luther," 32, writes, "Scripture proclaims, declares, pronounces and confesses the faith, it does not explain it." Hence, Luther's affirmation of Scripture's clarity points to the clarity of its *confession* and is not necessarily an explanatory clarity.

45. LW10:7, 11:517, 33:26, 35:122, 396; WA 3:13, 4:379–80, 18:606, 10/1–1:15; WADB 7:384.

the prime, self-authenticating authority of Scripture.

Calvin also strongly maintained that the key subject matter of Scripture is clear. He affirmed the perspicuity of the trinitarian, christological, and soteriological scope and content of Scripture. This affirmation of the christological center of Scripture came alongside the affirmation of the clear saving purposes of Scripture. In his "Preface to Olivétan's New Testament," Calvin wrote, "This is what we should in short seek in the whole of Scripture: truly to know Jesus Christ and the infinite riches that are comprised in him and are offered to us by him from God the Father."[46] Likewise, Calvin's main purpose in writing the *Institutes* was to highlight the key subject matter of Scripture to serve as a guide in reading it, precisely by arranging the *Institutes* in accordance with the scriptural loci outlined in Romans: creation, the fall, Trinity, incarnation, law and gospel, justification by faith alone, election, the church, and the sacraments. Though Calvin and Luther differed in some important details, they both affirmed the perspicuous content of Scripture as teaching about human sinfulness, the inability of humans to save themselves by their own efforts, and their need for Christ through the Spirit's work of faith.[47] Hence Calvin advanced the teaching of the bound will as a central element of Scripture's clarity, but he added that it can be comprehended only with the aid of the Holy Spirit.[48]

To put it another way, in the view of the Reformers, the primary goal of Scripture is to reveal Christ. Luther and Calvin affirmed that all of Scripture points to Christ.[49] This goal of revealing Christ connects

46. Calvin, "Preface to Olivétan's New Testament," in *Calvin: Commentaries*, trans. and ed. Joseph Haroutunian, Library of Christian Classics 23 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958), 70.

47. For example, Luther more exactly identified the perspicuity of Scripture with the doctrine of justification by faith alone, law, and gospel. Calvin affirmed these doctrines, but expressed them under slightly different terms and emphases; he named them more in terms of God's single covenant (dependent on grace with no role for human merit) that spans both testaments and God's providential care of the church.

48. Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.1–18. Calvin repeatedly accentuated the Holy Spirit's necessary illumination to comprehend and accept the biblical teaching of the bondage of the will (*Institutes* 2.2.19–21, 25).

49. Luther, LW 10:7; 33:26; 35:122, 236, 247; WA 3:13; 18:606; 10/1:16; WADB 8:11–12, 28; Calvin, *Joannis Calvini opera selecta*, 5 vols., eds. Peter Barth and Wilhelm Niesel (Munich: Kaiser, 1926–1952) [hereafter "CO"], 45:486, 47:125; *Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew Mark, and Luke*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 1:311 (Matthew 17:3); *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 1:218 (John. 5:39); *Institutes* 1.13.7 and 4.2.4.

directly to Scripture's soteriological telos: to reveal Christ is to reveal God's ordained path of salvation (i.e., justification by faith alone). For the Protestant Reformers, the true act of reading Scripture is a moment of transformative encounter with God. Should God act to give the necessary gift of faith and the Holy Spirit, one then encounters the Triune God as the very illuminator and interpreter of God's Word. It is an encounter that calls for the confession of self as sinner and the recognition of the gracious Triune God to whom all honor is due. Thus Calvin proclaimed, "The Word of God is something alive and full of hidden power that leaves nothing in the human untouched."[50] Similarly, Luther described the encounter of the believer with Scripture in these words: "And note that the strength of Scripture is this: that it is not changed into the one who studies it, but that it transforms its lover into itself and its strengths."[51] In this way, reading Scripture creates a sacred space in which the Holy Spirit illuminates the words of Scripture so that one may be transformed into greater conformity to Christ and glimpse the very heart of God.

Misunderstandings of the Protestant Reformers' Assertions of Scripture's Clarity

There are a number of common misunderstandings regarding the Protestant Reformers' assertions of Scripture's perspicuity. First, their affirmation of Scripture's clarity does not entail an affirmation that Scripture is clear for anyone and everyone. Rather, since Scripture's clarity is dependent on God's activity alone, it is clear only to those who have been given the gift of faith through the working of the Holy Spirit. Second, the affirmation of Scripture's perspicuity does not mean that *all* of Scripture is clear. Rather, the Protestant Reformers maintained that the *subject matter* of Scripture is clear: Scripture clearly reveals the Triune God, the incarnation, the path of salvation through Christ in justification by faith alone, and the necessary aid of the Holy Spirit. That is, Scripture clearly teaches about human sinfulness, the inability of humans to save themselves by their own efforts, and their need of Christ. Third, the Protestant Reformers grounded their affirmation of Scripture's perspicuity in the central biblical teaching of justification by faith alone.

The doctrine of justification by faith alone is the very perspicuous heart of Scripture, the very key to accessing Scripture's clear content,

50. Calvin, CO 55:50; *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, trans. John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1853), 51.

51. Luther, LW 10:332; WA 3:397.

and the very principle that undergirds Scripture's prime authority. First and foremost, the doctrine of justification by faith alone undergirds the Reformers' insistence that God is the primary, even the sole, agent in the act of Scripture's true interpretation. Consequently, Scripture is its own authority, and Scripture is literally self-interpreting. It is the prime authority ordained by God and, therefore, is not subject to any form of human authority, whether in the form of the church, ecclesial hierarchy, human reason (of learned academics), *or the priesthood of all believers.* Moreover, since Scripture is not subject to *any* form of human authority, it cannot be subject to human interpretation as in itself carrying any authority. An incredibly robust pneumatology is absolutely crucial to the Protestant Reformers' affirmation of Scripture's authority and clarity. They expected an encounter with the living God in Scripture; they expected the Holy Spirit to act, to speak, to guide, and to interpret. They also expected that these operations of the Holy Spirit would be clearly recognizable to any truly faithful Christian as the very work of the Spirit and not a human work. The last thing the Reformers wanted was for Scripture to be subjected again to human forms of authority, whether in the form of papal authority or in the form of individual Christians who claimed the guidance of the Holy Spirit.[52] Yet in actual practice, discerning the true work of the Spirit from human manipulation was an immensely challenging task that ultimately required a re-articulation and repositioning of the authoritative role of the church in Scripture's interpretation.

The External Clarity of Scripture and the Role of the Church

In his response to Erasmus on the bondage of the human will, Martin Luther wrote of two kinds of clarity in Scripture: an external clarity that "pertained to the ministry of the Word" and an internal clarity that is

52. Luther pointed to the pope and the "fanatics" as equally incorrect in their approaches to Scripture. He wrote, "Nor do I approve of those who have recourse to boasting in the Spirit; for I have had this year and am still having a sharp enough fight with those fanatics who subject the Scriptures to the interpretation of their own spirit. It is on this account also that I have hitherto attacked the pope, in whose kingdom nothing is more commonly stated or more generally accepted than the idea that the Scriptures are obscure and ambiguous, so that the spirit to interpret them must be sought from the Apostolic See of Rome. Nothing more pernicious could be said than this, for it has let ungodly men to set themselves above the Scriptures and to fabricate whatever they please" (LW 33:90; WA 18:653).

53. Luther, LW 33:28; WA 18:609. In several respects, this article thus far has addressed more the matter of Scripture's internal clarity.

"located in the understanding of the heart."[53] He described this internal clarity by asserting that no person "perceives one iota of what is in the Scriptures unless he [or she] has the Spirit of God."[54] Concerning Scripture's external clarity, Luther added, "If, on the other hand, you speak of the external clarity, nothing at all is left obscure or ambiguous, but everything in the Scriptures has been brought out by the Word into the most definite light and published to the whole world."[55] Such descriptions do not immediately clarify the definitions of or differences between these two kinds of clarity. Later in this treatise, however, Luther aligned them with two kinds of judgment, in which he had exactly in mind the problems of papal authority and the radicals' "boasting of the Spirit":

> The spirits are to be tested or proved by two sorts of judgment. One is internal, whereby through the Holy Spirit… anyone who is enlightened concerning oneself and one's own salvation judges and discerns with the greatest of certainty human dogmas and opinions. Of this it is said in 1 Corinthians 2:15: "The spiritual person judges all things but is judged by no one." This belongs to faith and is necessary for every individual Christian. We have called it previously the internal clarity of Scripture…but this judgment helps no one else and with it we are not here concerned.…There is another—an external judgment—whereby with the greatest of certainty we judge all human spirits and dogmas, not only for ourselves but also for others and for their salvation. This judgment belongs to the public ministry of the Word and to the outward office and is chiefly the concern of leaders and preachers of the Word. We make use of it when we seek to strengthen those who are weak in faith and confute opponents. This is what we earlier called the external clarity of Holy Scripture. Thus we say that all spirits are to be tested in the presence of the church at the bar of Scripture. For it ought above all to be established among Christians that the Holy Scriptures are a spiritual light far brighter than the sun itself, especially in things that are necessary to salvation.[56]

54. Ibid.

55. LW 33:28; WA 18:609.

56. LW 33:90–91; WA 18:653. The quote in footnote 52 appears immediately prior to this quote.

Luther went on to clarify that the internal clarity of Scripture aids the individual believer in judging right interpretation and teaching of Scripture, but it is a judgment that does not hold authority beyond the life of that individual believer. Indeed, Calvin described this as the working of the Holy Spirit to confirm the authority of Scripture and enable the acceptance of Scripture's teachings in the hearts of believers by the "seal of the inward testimony of the Spirit."[57] Thus there is a place for the working of the Holy Spirit in the individual, but this is not to lead to the individual's asserting his own biblical interpretation as the true, Spirit-inspired, authoritative interpretation. When it comes to the *public* judgment of others' teachings and interpretations of Scripture, Luther points to Scripture's external clarity, and he places this work of discernment under the leadership of the public ministerial offices of the Word. Lest one mistake this as reasserting ecclesiastical authority akin to that of the Roman Catholics of his day, he crucially added that they should be "tested in the presence of the church *at the bar of Scripture.*" In this way, ultimately the authority exercised is not in the first instance the public minister's authority per se; rather, it is the duty of the public minster to *uphold and implement the authority of Scripture.* Here the external clarity of Scripture equates with the clear subject matter of Scripture—Trinity, incarnation, salvation in Christ (i.e., justification by faith alone), and Christ's eternal kingdom—to serve as a boundary line to judge right teaching and interpretation. Indeed, this is what the Protestant Reformers called the *analogia fidei* (analogy of faith) or *regula fidei* (rule of faith). Luther specifically identified this "rule of faith" with the rule of justification by faith alone, which he believed to be the perspicuous content of Scripture.[58] Calvin followed in similar suit, asserting the *analogia fidei* as the "clear rule and test of all interpretation of Scripture" in which the criterion of this test was the recognition that "we are naked of all virtue in order to be clothed by God."[59]

The Protestant Reformers sought carefully to carve out the proper function of church authority between the so-called "tyranny" of the Roman Catholics and the "sedition" of the radicals. For example, Calvin maintained that both the radicals and the Roman Catholics misconstrued

57. Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.4–5.

58. See, for example, LW 17:114, 256; WA 31/2:350–51, 458–59.

59. Calvin, "Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France," in the *Institutes of Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 12–13.

the proper role of the church in the proclamation and interpretation of Scripture. Many radicals, on the one hand, despised the ministerial offices and "even Scripture itself in order to attain the Spirit."[60] On the contrary, argued Calvin, God designated human ministers as the means by which the Word of God should be proclaimed and the faithful edified.[61] Hence Calvin, Luther, and Zwingli strongly affirmed the necessity of properly called, trained, and ordained public ministers. While they continued to affirm the priesthood of all believers, they clarified that this affirmation in no way disregarded the ministerial offices God ordained. Rather, "all things should be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40). Hence, though any Christian has the right of judging whether a public proclamation is in accordance with Scripture, this should not be a disruptive public practice but a private reproof, in accordance with Matthew 18:15 ("go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone").[62] On the other hand, the Protestant Reformers instructed ordained clergy not to act like tyrants but to allow room for lay voices. They charged the clergy to cultivate the necessary virtues of humility and teachableness, for "God has never so blessed his servants that they each possessed full and perfect knowledge of every part of their subject. It is clear that God's purpose in so limiting our knowledge was first that we should be kept humble and also that we should continue to have dealings with our fellow Christians."[63] Hence pastors, even as they preach and teach, continue to be lifelong learners, for it is incumbent upon them "to determine whether what they say conforms to that which God has given through the Scriptures."[64]

In essence, the Protestant Reformers aimed to retain the authority of public ministerial offices insofar as these functioned under and in

60. Calvin, CO 52:176; *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. Ross Mackenzie, ed. David Torrance and Thomas Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 377.

61. Calvin, *Institutes* 4.1.5, 4.3.2.

62. Luther, LW 45:358–61, 363; 40:388, 390–92. Cf. Zwingli, CR 91:394–99; "The Preaching Office," trans. Edward J. Furcha, in *Huldrych Zwingli Writings*, vol. 2, ed. H. Wayne Pipkin (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 1984), 158–61; Bullinger, *In Priorem D. Pauli ad Corinthios Epistolam Commentarius* (Tigvri apvd Christoph froscho mense ive, 1534), 183a.

63. Calvin, *Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, 4.

64. Calvin, *Supplementa Calviniana*, Sermons inédits V, Sermons sur le Livre de Michée, ed. Jean Daniel Benoit (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsverins, 1964), 89, as cited and translated by Ward Holder, "*Ecclesia, Legenda atque Intelligenda Scriptura*: The Church as Discerning Community in Calvin's Hermeneutic," *Calvin Theological Journal* 36 (2001): 283.

compliance with the prime authority of Scripture. They believed that the subject matter of Scripture was sufficiently clear to act as the authoritative guide. One may be rightfully wary of their confidence in this criterion, given that even agreement regarding the topics of Scripture's clear subject matter does not necessarily entail agreement about how to interpret or apply them. Yet this is precisely why anchoring these claims in the doctrine of justification by faith alone was so crucial and absolute for the Protestant Reformers. This principle not only established the necessity of Christ; it also aimed to call and recall the faithful Christian repeatedly to a posture of *profound humility*—the humble recognition of absolute dependence on God. It aimed further to call the Christian to *a profound life of faith*—a faith that looked for and expected *God's* action, a faith that waited to see if one's reading of Scripture truly bore the fruits of the Spirit. Perhaps we have struggled with rightly understanding and practicing the Reformers' affirmation of the perspicuity of Scripture not so much because it does not solve the problem of the actual role of human interpretation (which, admittedly, it does not) but because we (and the Protestant Reformers themselves!) too often fail to embody the necessary virtues of the profound humility and faith it demands.

Reading Paul with the Reformers

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How should we think about the Reformers as interpreters of Paul at the 500th anniversary of their transformation of church and society?[1] Should our interest be antiquarian only, their interpretation of the Pauline letters of value for how we understand the sixteenth century and its conflicts but of little direct interest for our own task of interpreting the New Testament in and for the twenty-first century? Or, at the opposite extreme, do the Reformers provide for us exegetical and theological touchstones, departures from which must be resisted as a falling away from the truth of the gospel?

In the aftermath of rise of the New Perspective on Paul (hereafter NPP) in the late 1970s and early 1980s, New Testament scholars largely adopted the first of these approaches. The NPP offered a reevaluation of Second Temple Judaism, emphasizing that it cannot legitimately be interpreted as a religion of works-righteousness.[2] The responsibility for previous portrayals of Judaism as unhealthily legalistic was traced back to Luther's identification of the works-righteousness of his own opponents in the sixteenth century with that of Paul's opponents in the first century. Historically credible interpretation of the Pauline letters for the contemporary world therefore required rejection of trajectories of interpretation stemming from the Reformation. In contrast, some in the

1. This article draws extensively upon Stephen J. Chester, *Reading Paul with the Reformers: Reconciling Old and New Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017).

2. The label NPP continues to be used, even as it has become ever clearer that, outside of this central commitment to reevaluating Judaism in less prejudicial terms, what has resulted is not a monolithic single viewpoint but rather a variety of newer perspectives. Nevertheless, these various newer perspectives do share some characteristics, one of which is the view that older trajectories of interpretation that derived ultimately from the Protestant Reformers are significantly in error.

church and a minority in the academy simply sought to refute the NPP and reassert traditional perspectives.

In my view, neither of these responses is helpful. Whether acknowledged or not, the history of reception exercises influence over contemporary interpreters. The progenitors of the NPP were all Protestant exegetes of various kinds (e.g., E.P. Sanders, James Dunn, N.T. Wright), and, although most contemporary Pauline interpreters are genuinely in disagreement with Reformation exegesis at significant points, on other exegetical issues, positions first developed in the sixteenth century remain influential. As John Riches comments, there are problems with buying into "the school of thought which imagines that truly historical readings of the biblical books can be achieved only if we divest ourselves of traditional church understandings. Where those of strong Christian beliefs are concerned such an act of self-mutilation usually results in their readings being unconsciously guided by their (only partially discarded after all) theological prejudices (Gadamer)."[3] At the other extreme, however, simply to reassert Reformation perspectives without qualification brings its own problems. The simple fact that the Reformers are the founders of traditions to which many of us belong does not make them right on all exegetical issues. Further, the Reformers were interpreting for and from within very different contexts from our own, and simply to repristinate their exegesis represents an unhelpful nostalgia that evades present challenges rather than meets them. Effective use of the resources offered by the Reformers requires us instead to sift their exegetical conclusions critically and to bring them into conversation with our own questions and concerns, sharpening our own focus as we stage a dialogue with them about interpretative issues.

The Reformers as Exegetical Innovators

If we are to stage such a dialogue, it is necessary first to comprehend in its own context the nature of the Reformers' achievement as Pauline interpreters. For if we are to understand which elements of their Pauline interpretation persist in contemporary scholarship, which are most appropriately left in the sixteenth century, and which might profitably be recovered, we must establish what the Reformers proposed and what they reacted against. At the heart of their achievement lies the formation of a new paradigm for Pauline interpretation. Early Lutheran and early

3. John K. Riches, "Book of the Month: Commenting on Romans in Its Original Context," *Expository Times* 119, no. 1 (2007): 29.

Reformed interpreters together founded a new tradition of reading Paul that transformed the legacy of Pauline interpretation they inherited from the patristic and medieval eras.[4] One way in which to picture this new tradition is through the analogy of language and grammar. The Reformers' language of Pauline theology is a new language, radically different from the language of Pauline theology spoken by their predecessors, and sometimes unfathomable to those for whom that earlier language was native. The Reformers can speak this new language because, in their shared exegetical conclusions, they have developed a new exegetical "grammar" of Pauline theology. Just as grammatical principles structure and enable the use of a language, so these exegetical conclusions about fundamental aspects of Paul's meaning provide structure for and enable the Reformers' new interpretations of Pauline texts.[5] There may be disagreements, but these disagreements take place within this new exegetical grammar, which is different from the one within which their Catholic opponents interpreted Paul.

This new exegetical grammar was not intended to produce mere novelty. The Reformers "strove for a *reformation* in the sense of the restoration of the original form of the true congregation of Jesus Christ—and in this respect a renewal of the contemporary Church: *renovatio* not *innovatio*!"[6] They regarded themselves as the true Catholics, prophetically offering the opportunity for repentance and restoration to a stiff-necked people who would not listen. Yet, while this sense of continuity should help us avoid facile, sweeping characterizations of the Reformation as the sudden springing into being of the modern world and alert us to the possibility

4. The term "the Reformers" can legitimately be used in various ways, sometimes to cover all advocates of reform in the sixteenth century whose religion can ultimately be traced to Luther's rebellion against the Roman Catholic Church and who can retrospectively be designated using the term "Protestant," sometimes even more broadly to include even those advocates of reform who remained within the Roman Catholic Church. In terms of the development of a new Pauline exegetical grammar, I here apply it more narrowly to early Lutheran and early Reformed exegetes only.

5. I am here adopting and adapting a concept of Luther's own. He speaks of "a new and theological grammar" (*Luther's Works* [LW] 26:267) that replaces a previous "moral grammar" (LW 26:268) and that he applies to interpreting texts that might seem to speak of righteousness by works. In Luther's new grammar, these texts speak of deeds of love as the fruit of faith that grows from justification rather than as in any way the basis on which justification is granted. All references to Luther's texts are to the American edition, 55 vols. original series; 11 vols. to date in new series (St Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986, 2010–).

6. Berndt Hamm, "How Innovative was the Reformation?" in *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety*, ed. Robert J. Bast (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 254.

of some striking continuities in aspects of theology,[7] it should not blind us to the scale of change represented by the Reformers' conclusions about Pauline interpretation. Although worked out in dialogue with patristic and medieval predecessors, the Reformers' new Pauline exegetical grammar differentiates them sharply from such predecessors and overturned widespread assumptions stretching back centuries about the meaning of key terms and concepts. Their undeniably frequent dependence on predecessors for particular exegetical points should not be allowed to obscure the fact that these continuities exist within a radically altered framework. In relation to key issues in Paul's description of the human plight apart from Christ (e.g., the nature of sin, the law, and the conscience) and in relation to his description of salvation in Christ (e.g., the works of the law, grace, and faith), the Reformers developed a powerful new consensus that set limits within their communities of interpretation as to what could plausibly be proposed.[8]

The Content of the Reformers' New Pauline Exegetical Grammar

The medieval Pauline exegetical grammar that the Reformers rejected was shaped profoundly by the influence of Augustine. Ever since Augustine's dispute with Pelagius in the early fifth century, it had been widely recognized that Paul teaches that salvation begins with divine initiative. The impact of sin means that fallen human beings can act justly only as a result of the gift of God's grace granted in initial justification. The law can reveal to human beings what God requires and demonstrate their sinfulness, but it is unable to give the power to obey. No one can make themselves righteous apart from the gift of grace, which is available only because of the person and work of Christ. Yet once the initial gift of infused grace is received in baptism, it is the Christian's responsibility to

7. In recent historiography, the trend has been to stress the continuity between the Reformation and the medieval world. See Susan Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3–11; Gerhard Müller, "Luther's Transformation of Medieval Thought: Discontinuity and Continuity," and Volker Leppin, "Luther's Transformation of Medieval Thought: Continuity and Discontinuity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L'ubomír Bakta (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 105–14, 115–24. In many respects the emphasis on continuity is extremely helpful, but in the Reformers' Pauline exegesis it finds perhaps its greatest challenge.

8. On all these issues, the Reformers adopt the same positions as each other over and against their Catholic opponents. Something of a partial exception to this pattern, and therefore a distinctive voice within early Protestant exegesis, is Martin Bucer. See Brian Lugioyo, *Martin Bucer's Doctrine of Justification: Reformation Theology and Early Modern Irenicism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 37–102.

cooperate with the gift by performing meritorious good works in love of God and neighbor. Grace is something infused within those who believe, and there is not only initial justification but also justification as a lifetime process in which individuals gradually became more Christ-like.

Paul's statements that justification is not by works of the law are typically understood to apply only to initial justification.[9] Paul intends to say that good works do not contribute to initial justification, not to deny that works of charity play a crucial part in the ongoing process of justification. Within this process, the sins of believers result in a loss of grace, but the merits of their good works and their accessing of the grace made available through the sacraments of the church result in its increase. There are mortal sins (e.g., murder) that might endanger the whole process but also a whole host of less serious venial sins in relation to which works such as fasting, almsgiving, and prayer are efficacious. When Paul speaks of the flesh that wars against the spirit (Galatians 5:17), he is referring primarily to the desires of the body that threaten to overwhelm the higher rational parts of a person. When the baptized person still experiences desire for things contrary to God's will, this is not in itself sin and does not in itself lead to a loss of grace and justice unless these desires are assented to and acted upon.

No one can know with certainty where they have reached in their own journey of justification or whether and how much time in purgatory might be necessary to complete the process and fit them for heaven. So while hope can be strong, complete assurance is possible only in relation to God's desire to forgive and not in relation to whether a person has attained salvation. Faith plays an important but carefully defined role in this process. It is from faith that good works flow, and yet faith by itself is not capable of such works. Faced by the need to coordinate Pauline texts that assert that faith is the instrument through which God justifies (e.g., Galatians 2:16) with James's denial that justification is by faith alone (James 2:24), medieval theologians took Galatians 5:6, where Paul asserts that in Christ what counts is faith working through love, to indicate that faith works only when it is formed by love. Apart from love, faith (typically translated using the Latin word *fides*) is intellectual assent to the truth of the gospel that depends on love to vivify it

9. A minority of medieval commentators follow Ambrosiaster in believing that Paul's phrase "the works of the law" refers to Jewish ceremonies only and not to the moral law. However, this is not taken to contradict the view that good works play no part in initial justification but merely to indicate that it was not Paul's purpose to comment directly on the issue.

from something that is primarily cognitive to something that is living and active. It is when Christians have this faith formed by love that they progress in righteousness and begin to fulfill God's law. The goal of this process is a righteousness that is inherent to the Christian and will finally be measured against the righteousness of God. There is an objective judgment based on what the human being has become: "life is to be conceived of as a via for our transformation.…'In the end' the human should be able to stand before God on account of his merits. That merit is gained through working with God's grace, in which the human remains rooted."[10]

All of this the Reformers sweep away as representing a travesty of Paul's teaching. Instead they insist that cooperation with infused grace to produce works of righteousness is an illusion. Sin is an active inclination of the will against God, and Paul's term "the flesh" denotes the whole of a human being in rebellion against God. It is not simply that sin has captured the body so that sin is to be identified primarily with the desires of the body. Sin does not only disrupt healthy hierarchies between mind and body and between reason or the will and other parts of the soul, so that the lower will not obey the higher. Instead sin also captures the higher faculties. The whole person is captive unless set free by God, and for people even to recognize their captivity and their need of Christ is a matter of divine revelation. The instrument of this revelation is the law. It demonstrates to people their sin and drives them to seek Christ. Yet this revelation accomplishes little if it stops simply with the recognition of sin and with despair. People need to be assured not just that they are sinners but that it is God's purpose in Christ to save them. God's grace is not something that God infuses into those who believe, but rather refers primarily to the favor with which God regards those who believe in Jesus. Grace is a divine disposition not a quality infused into the believer.

What matters in salvation is therefore to cast oneself upon Christ and his saving work alone. The believer is judged on the basis not of his or her own deeds but those of Christ. When Paul says that justification is not by works of the law, he intends to exclude from justification the whole law. The works of charity are not in any sense an efficient cause of justification. Paul is opposing the works-righteousness of his first-century opponents, just as the Reformers oppose the works-righteousness of their sixteenth-century opponents. The righteousness of Christ granted to the believer

10. Daphne Hampson, *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 83–84.

in justification is perfect and cannot be supplemented or completed. It is also alien: it remains wholly and entirely that of Christ. This righteousness is received by faith through the preaching of the biblical word, with those who believe drawn out of themselves and into total reliance on the promises of God. People do not encounter God by looking inward, but rather they encounter God as the convicting power of the word turns them outward toward Christ. They do not need to wonder if they have salvation but can instead have full assurance, for this depends not on them but on the already perfectly accomplished saving work of Christ on their behalf. This saving faith is thus not just intellectual assent to the facts of the gospel but trust (typically translated using the Latin word *fiducia*) that what God has accomplished in Christ is indeed effective for those who believe. As such, this faith is not something incomplete that needs love to form it and make it alive but is rather the power that makes it possible for love to be put into action. Faith is active, or it is not truly faith. Thus, believers will experience ethical transformation—and indeed the absence of such transformation could only indicate that faith is not genuine and justification not received—but nevertheless such transformation does not form part of the basis of justification before God. Deeds matter profoundly, but they do not justify; and it is this error that Paul is concerned to deny when he insists repeatedly that justification is not by the "works of the law" (e.g., Romans 3:20, 28; Galatians 3:16). Justification is instead by faith alone.

The Reformers' Pauline Exegetical Grammar in Present Perspective

To sketch briefly these contrasting Pauline exegetical grammars leaves many questions unexplored, for any such grammar is the consequence of multiple exegetical decisions. It does, however, demonstrate how such decisions sometimes cohere together in the history of reception to provide radically alternative frameworks. It is not that there is no continuity in detail between the two frameworks. In the descriptions above, for example, the function of the law in revealing human sin is similar in both exegetical grammars, yet it is located very differently in relation to concepts of justification. The medieval exegetical grammar locates it in relation to the incapacity of human works to contribute to initial justification; the Reformers in relation to the exclusion of all human works from the causes of justification. The overall framework is very different.

If we turn from the relationship between the Reformers' Pauline inter-

pretation and that of their medieval predecessors to the relationship between the Reformers' Pauline interpretation and contemporary Pauline scholarship, what do we find? Are the overall frameworks just as different, or is the relationship more complicated? In fact, the consensus forged within contemporary Pauline scholarship by the NPP runs across a much narrower front than that found within the Reformers' Pauline exegetical grammar. In the crucial question of the nature of Second Temple Judaism and Paul's relationship to it, the impact of the NPP does, however, run very deep. It is no longer possible to credibly portray Judaism as a legalistic religion devoid of grace, oriented toward the earning of salvation. This impact can be seen clearly in current discussion of the phrase "works of the law." The interpretation of the phrase still provokes vigorous debate, and there are good reasons to think that Dunn and other interpreters are wrong to insist that for Paul it always refers primarily to the boundary makers of circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath observance that serve to separate Jews from Gentiles in social practice. The phrase in fact denotes the whole Jewish way of life, swathed in nomistic observance. The boundary markers are centrally important to that way of life, but to speak of them alone is to miss other aspects and functions of the "works of the law."

Nevertheless, the NPP represents a significant and salutary advance in turning Pauline scholarship away from sweeping negative characterizations of Judaism and toward engagement with the realities of Jewish practice. Here we should remember that the Reformers were not historical-critical scholars, nor did they have access to the range of sources that allow contemporary scholarship to present more nuanced accounts of Second Temple Judaism. Yet if our question is how the exegetical legacy of the Reformers relates to our own contemporary task of interpretation, it is indisputable that the Reformers do not pay sufficient attention to these realities of Jewish practice. Dunn's complaint that "Luther's fundamental distinction between gospel and law was too completely focused on the danger of self-achieved works righteousness"[11] can be illustrated by Luther's treatment of the incident at Antioch (Galatians 2:11–14) in his famous 1535 *Commentary on Galatians*. Luther leaps directly into the relationship between the law and the gospel without any attention to Jew-Gentile relationships within the church. For an interpreter to adopt the same procedure today would be to fail to recognize the centrality of

11. J.D.G. Dunn, "The New Perspective: Whence, What and Whither," in *The New Perspective on Paul*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 20.

practice to Jewish identity, which means that soteriological principles cannot easily be detached from the practices that embody them.

Thus there are very good reasons not to revive the polemic of the Reformers against works-righteousness. However, other aspects of the Reformers' exegetical grammar are in fact still current in contemporary exegesis, even if their contribution is rarely recognized. Pauline anthropology is one such area. As we have seen, the Reformers insisted that "the flesh" does not represent the lower component of anthropological hierarchies, either within the soul or between the soul and the body. For, as Melanchthon sharply formulated it, "*flesh* should be understood of whatever is in man without the Holy Spirit."[12] It is the whole person in rebellion against God. Similar positions can be found in contemporary scholarship. John Barclay states of Galatians 5:17 that "Paul is not concerned here with a 'fleshly' part of each individual (his physical being or his 'lower nature') but with the influence of an 'era' and its human traditions and assumptions."[13] This can be compared to Luther's assertion that "by flesh the whole man is meant…the inward and the outward man, or the new man and the old, are not distinguished according to the difference between soul and body but according to their dispositions."[14] There are some important differences in what these two statements affirm the nature of "the flesh" to be, notably between Luther's emphasis on the flesh as the total disposition of the unredeemed person and Barclay's broader focus on an era and its traditions (although a contrast between Paul's gospel and human traditions and assumptions is scarcely antithetical to Luther). However, the two are identical in what they deny. Contemporary scholars may locate their understandings of "the flesh" within overall interpretations of Paul that are significantly different from the Reformers' Pauline exegetical grammar. Yet on this issue itself, a commonplace conclusion in contemporary scholarship is an expression of the same exegetical conclusion as that reached by the Reformers.

Other aspects of Reformation interpretation are simply badly misunderstood in recent Pauline scholarship. Krister Stendahl's famous article "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West" used texts like Philippians 3:6 to draw attention to the robust conscience of Paul

12. Fred Kramer, trans., *Philip Melanchthon's Commentary on Romans* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), 170, emphasis original.

13. John M.G. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 213.

14. Luther, LW 27:367.

the Pharisee. Stendahl disputed any notion that a struggle with inability to obey the law formed the backdrop to Paul's Damascus Road experience.[15] The false assumption that it did form this backdrop Stendahl attributed to a projection back onto Paul of Luther's *Anfechtungen,* his struggles with spiritual despair.[16] The problem here is that there is little in the Reformers' exegesis to suggest they believed that all will struggle with a guilty conscience prior to faith, nor that they include Paul in this or take the experience of such struggle to be typical of Jewish engagement with the law. Luther and others read Philippians 3:6 as indicating that Paul's experience as a Pharisee is to be explained in terms of confident but misplaced zeal, a conclusion very similar to Stendahl's own. The Reformers' characterization of Judaism in terms of justification by works and their broader understanding of justification by faith in no way depend on Paul's having as a Pharisee struggled with a guilty conscience. Whatever the merits of Stendahl's alternative construal of justification in terms of the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's people, the notion that Reformation formulations of justification depend on Paul's having an introspective conscience cannot legitimately be used to bolster the credibility of Stendahl's own proposal.

At other points, the relationship between the Reformers' exegetical grammar and contemporary interpretation is less straightforward than either unacknowledged dependence or simple misunderstanding. Contemporary scholars sometimes intensify one element of the Reformers' exegetical grammar so strongly as to marginalize others. Thus, for example, N.T. Wright interprets Paul as a covenantal theologian, who understood himself as an actor within a single continuous story stretching from the creation of the world and the call of Abraham forward.[17] God entered into a covenant with Abraham's family to bless the world through that family. The people of Israel departed from their covenant obligations and ended up in exile, with even those Jews resident in the

15. Krister Stendahl, "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 78–96. Cf. Stephen J. Chester, "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of Martin Luther," in *Biblical Interpretation* 14, no. 5 (2006): 508–36.

16. Krister Stendahl, "Call Not Conversion," in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 12: "We all, in the West, especially in the tradition of the Reformation, cannot help reading Paul through the experience of persons like Luther and Calvin. And this is the chief reason for most of our misunderstandings of Paul."

17. See, for example, N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 114–39.

land of Israel reminded by Roman occupation that the exile continued in the sense that disobedience still estranged Israel from God and provided a barrier to blessing. On this view, Jesus the Messiah gives a surprising and definitive new twist to Israel's story, fulfilling the covenant, breaking the curse of continuing exile, and radically redefining the family of Abraham so as to include Gentiles. Justification is therefore understood not primarily in terms of dealing with sin but as a covenantal issue, with those justified declared to be members of God's people. Justification is forensic and does involve union with Christ, but its point of impact is different from that found in Reformation accounts. For this reason, Wright's account of justification has been much criticized from within the Reformed tradition, and he typically contrasts his exegetical conclusions with those belonging within trajectories of interpretation derived from the Reformers. Yet this is only part of the story, for the category of covenant is an important one within Reformed theology in general and for Calvin in particular. Wright's interpretation of Paul thus conflicts with much in the Reformed tradition, but it does so by intensifying one of its own most important themes to such a degree as to displace others.

Similarly, divine initiative in salvation is very strongly emphasized in what is increasingly labeled the "apocalyptic" interpretation of Paul in contrast to "covenantal" interpretations, such as that of Wright.[18] For an interpreter like J.L. Martyn, all talk of continuity in salvation history such that the Gentiles are called into the existing people of God obscures the invasive grace of God that in Christ works a new creation and cuts across all human traditions and institutions. Similarly, Martyn takes Paul's disputed genitive phrase *pistis Iēsou Christou* (which can be translated either as an objective genitive, "faith in Christ," or as a subjective genitive, "faithfulness of Christ") to refer to Christ's faithful obedience, thereby removing any possibility of misconstruing justifying faith as a human possibility: "God has set things right without laying down a prior condition of any sort. God's rectifying act, that is to say, is no more God's response to human faith in Christ than it is God's response to human observance of the law. God's rectification is not God's response at all. It is the *first* move; it is God's initiative, carried out by him in Christ's

18. The terminology is potentially confusing since it is perfectly possible to regard apocalyptic as an important motif in Paul's theology but to position it within an overall interpretation more appropriately labeled "covenantal." See, for example, Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 40.

faithful death."[19] In his work, Douglas Campbell offers strong contrasts between conditional and unconditional salvation, between prospective epistemology (prior human awareness of sin prompts repentance and faith) and retrospective epistemology (the divine gift of faith reveals the depth of human bondage to sin), and between individualist and corporate emphases. Here it is the first member of each pair that represents a catastrophic misinterpretation of Paul, while the second member of each pair represents a healthy pathway in interpretation, consistent with a strong emphasis on divine initiative in salvation.

There is much here that resonates with the Reformers' critique of human religiosity and their emphasis on the soteriological priority of divine initiative. Yet this element has become so highly developed as to limit what can be said concerning the Reformers' equally emphatic emphasis on the active nature of human faith and its crucial role in appropriating Christ and his saving benefits. It is one thing to insist with the Reformers on the gifted nature of human faith; it is quite another so to fear any compromise of divine initiative as to be left unable to say very much concerning the nature of the gift.[20] The very intensification of one motif or interpretative element has led to the diminution of another out of a sense of the paramount importance of preserving the former in its purest possible form.[21]

Resources for Contemporary Interpretation from the Reformers' Exegesis: Human Faith

The relationship between the Reformers' Pauline exegetical grammar and contemporary Pauline scholarship is thus more complex than might be imagined. As well as genuine disagreement over the meaning of the phrase the "works of the law" and the nature of Judaism, there is also unacknowledged dependence, rejection based on simple misunderstand-

19. J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 271, commenting on Galatians 2:16, emphasis original. The debate concerning subjective versus objective genitive is sometimes characterized as a choice between a christocentric option ("faithfulness of Christ") and an anthropological option ("faith in Christ"), but if, with Luther and Calvin, faith in Christ is understood to unite the believer with Christ (see below), then the objective genitive can also be characterized as christocentric.

20. Martyn, *Galatians*, 275–77, does not ignore human faith or deny its importance but is left with little to say about faith *exegetically* except to deny its human origin.

21. This phenomenon of intensifying or perfecting a concept is discussed by John M.G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 66–78.

ing, and intensification of some elements at the expense of others. Here it is significant that one of the clearest examples of intensification is an emphasis on divine initiative in salvation so strong that it prevents full exploration of the nature of human faith. For this is an aspect of the Reformers' exegesis with the potential to help stimulate fresh and productive thinking within contemporary scholarship. The Reformers offer a nuanced, multi-dimensional account of human faith that contrasts not only with its neglect in recent "apocalyptic" interpretations of Paul but also with the emphasis on faith as revised self-understanding characteristic of mid-twentieth century accounts.[22]

It is well-known that the Reformers argue that in many Pauline texts concerning justification the Greek noun "faith" (*pistis*) bears the sense of "trust" (*fiducia*) in response to God's promises. Here the example of Abraham (Romans 4, Galatians 3) in trusting God's promise of a son is particularly important. Sinners must accept that they come before God empty-handed and that their hope is based entirely upon the gifts of God that can only come to them from outside the self. In this sense, faith is primarily receptive. What is less often remembered is the Reformers' insistence that such faith is not, however, passively receptive. Faith is *active* and impacts every aspect of a person's existence. As Luther defined faith in the *Preface to Romans* (1522) of his German Bible, "It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and brings with it the Holy Spirit. O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith."[23] Faith that justifies is not simply intellectual assent. Such faith also works, even if the works it performs are not a cause of justification. Further, justifying faith also offers true worship. In believing God's promises, Abraham considers and confesses God to be truthful and, in so doing, gives God the worship that is God's due. Faith justifies because in accepting God's promises it acknowledges and honors God as God. Faith lets God be God. Paul's statement in Romans 4:20, that Abraham "grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God," was one of the biblical bases upon which this emphasis found an enduring place in early Protestant exegesis. Calvin is typical of many when he makes this aspect of faith paradigmatic of true worship:

22. New discussions of human faith are beginning to appear. See, for example, Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith:* Pistis *and* Fides *in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

23. Luther, LW 35:370.

> No greater honour can be given to God than by sealing His truth by our faith. On the other hand, no greater insult can be shown to Him than by rejecting the grace which He offers us, or by detracting from the authority of His Word. For this reason the main thing in the worship of God is to embrace His promises with obedience. True religion begins with faith.[24]

Finally, the Reformers' exegesis stresses that Abraham received what was not possible humanly speaking. He walked by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7):

> Abraham is justified not because he believes this or that promise of God but because he stands ready to believe any promise of God, no matter how violently it may contradict the judgments of his own prudential reason and common sense. Abraham's faith is not so much an act (e.g., believing that Sarah will become pregnant in spite of her advanced years) as a disposition (e.g., believing that whatever God promises, however startling, he is able to perform).[25]

This emphasis on faith as believing in defiance of reason or common sense demonstrates that faith trusts, however discouraging its circumstances. As Calvin wrote, again in response to Romans 4:20, "Our circumstances are all in opposition to the promises of God.…What then are we to do? We must close our eyes, disregard ourselves and all things connected with us, so that nothing may hinder or prevent us from believing that God is true."[26] This commitment to trusting reception of divine promises in the face of apparently contradictory experiences is connected to the certainty of faith or assurance. For the Reformers, uncertainty about justification is inconsistent with Paul's assertions that the Spirit enables believers as children of God and heirs of a divine inheritance to cry "Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:15–17; Galatians 4:6–7).

Thus, faith trusts, faith works, faith worships, faith disregards discouraging circumstances, and faith grants assurance. These dimensions of faith identified by the Reformers may not be the only ones present in the

24. *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 8, *The Epistles of the Apostle Paul to the Romans and the Thessalonians*, trans. R. Mackenzie, ed. D.W. Torrance and T.F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 99.

25. David C. Steinmetz, "Abraham and the Reformation," in *Luther in Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 41.

26. *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* 8:99.

Pauline letters, but the richness of their reflections upon the theme serves to remind contemporary interpreters of faith's central importance and provide a caution against accounts of faith that explain it in one way only.

Resources for Contemporary Interpretation from the Reformers' Exegesis: Union with Christ

The dimensions of faith discussed above are ubiquitous in the Reformers' Pauline exegesis. However, perhaps the most important aspect of faith is one at which differences emerge between leading exegetes. Melanchthon typically describes justification by faith in relational terms. He will sometimes say that the righteousness received by the believer is the righteousness of Christ, but much more often that believers are justified "on account of [*propter*] Christ" (alternatively translated "because of Christ" or "for the sake of Christ"). He does not argue that Christ is present in faith, and, therefore, united with him by faith the believer receives Christ's righteousness. Nor does he characteristically argue that Christ's righteousness is in some sense transferred to the believer. Melanchthon seems content to say that Christ is and remains the mediator whose death pleads the believer's case before the Father: "For we are righteous, that is, accepted by God, not on account of our perfection but through mercy on account of Christ, as long as we take hold of it and set it against the wrath of God."[27]

In contrast, both Luther and Calvin connect justification strongly to Paul's vocabulary of being "in Christ." Here it is faith that unites the believer with Christ, and the believer receives Christ's righteousness as a principal component of this union of persons. As Luther expresses it when commenting on Galatians 2:15–16, "Faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ…the Christ who is grasped by faith and who lives in the heart is true Christian righteousness."[28] For Luther the presence of Christ in faith is, like the divine presence in the cloud on Mount Sinai or in the Holy of Holies in the temple, mysterious and ultimately inexplicable but also powerful and transforming.[29] There is a "joyous exchange" in which Christ "took upon Himself our sinful person and granted to us His innocent and

27. "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," par. 227 in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Covenant Church*, ed. R. Kolb and T.J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

28. Luther, LW 26:130.

29. Ibid.

victorious person."[30] This means that, united with Christ by faith, the believer "can with confidence boast in Christ and say: Mine are Christ's living, doing and speaking, his suffering and dying, mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, suffered and died as he did."[31] Similarly, Calvin will explain that,

> When, therefore, we are justified, the efficient cause is the mercy of God, Christ is the substance [*materia*] of our justification, and the Word, with faith, the instrument. Faith is therefore said to justify, because it is the instrument by which we receive Christ, in whom righteousness is communicated to us. When we are made partakers of Christ [*facti sumus Christi participes*], we are not only ourselves righteous, but our works also are counted righteous in the sight of God, because any imperfections in them are obliterated by the blood of Christ.[32]

Alongside these similarities, there are also important differences in the ways in which Luther and Calvin develop the significance of union with Christ for justification. Luther emphasizes that the believer lives not his or her own life but in fact that of Christ. Commenting on Galatians 2:19–20 he says,

> I am not living as Paul now, for Paul is dead. Who then is living? "The Christian." Paul, living in himself is utterly dead through the Law but living in Christ, or rather with Christ living in him, he lives an alien life. Christ is speaking, acting, and performing all actions in him; these belong not to the Paul-life, but to the Christ-life.…[T]his death acquires an alien life for me, namely, the life of Christ, which is not inborn in me but is granted to me in faith through Christ.[33]

Since the believer is living the alien life of Christ, in this way the works that spring forth from faith are not in any conventional sense the believer's own, and they are not meritorious. Luther therefore feels no need to distinguish sharply between justification and ethical renewal. It is as a believer that the justified person produces good works, and these works can be considered part of justification without threatening to become one

30. Ibid. 26:284.
31. Ibid. 31:297.
32. *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* 8:73.
33. Luther, LW 26:170.

of its causes. For his part, Calvin defines justification in forensic terms and distinguishes clearly between justification and renewal, terming the latter "sanctification" or "regeneration." He insists that justification and sanctification are simultaneous but distinct aspects of union with Christ. They form a *duplex gratia* or double grace, twin principal saving benefits, both received in union with Christ by the agency of the Spirit:

> For from where does it come that we are justified by faith? It is because by faith we grasp Christ's righteousness which alone reconciles us to God. Now we cannot grasp this righteousness without also having sanctification. For when it is said that Christ is given to us for redemption, wisdom, and righteousness, it is likewise added that he is given to us for sanctification [1 Corinthians 1:30]. From that it follows that Christ does not justify anyone whom he does not at the same time sanctify. For these benefits are joined together by a perpetual tie; when He illumines us with His wisdom, He ransoms us; when He ransoms us, He justifies us; when He justifies us, He sanctifies us. But because it is now only a question of righteousness and sanctification, let us stop with these two. So although they must be distinguished, nevertheless Christ contains both inseparably. Do we want to receive righteousness in Christ? We must first possess Christ. Now we cannot possess Him without being participants in his sanctification, since He cannot be torn in pieces.[34]

Despite these important differences, the fact that Luther and Calvin both intimately connect justification by faith and union with Christ is of great significance. For in neither case are they retreating from the shared and relentless emphasis in early Protestant exegesis on the extrinsic nature of justification. This matters, for the insistence that those who believe receive justification only outside of themselves and that the righteousness of Christ remains an alien righteousness has often been identified as the source of difficulties in Protestant accounts of justification. Is it not when justification remains external that it becomes a legal fiction separated from the transformation that Paul so clearly expects in the lives of believers? Is it not when justification remains external that it becomes contractual, with faith filling the role of a human disposition that satisfies

34. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1541 French Edition, The First English Version*, trans. E.A. McKee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 356.

a divine requirement? These are real dangers when the extrinsic nature of justification is emphasized in isolation. However, when it is held together with an emphasis on union with Christ, as in the exegesis of Luther and Calvin, these dangers are averted. Justification is then not a legal fiction. This is evident in Luther's conviction that, although righteousness remains alien to the believer, it is essential that the believer lives an alien life, and in Calvin's insistence that, alongside justification, sanctification is one of the simultaneous twin key aspects of union with Christ. Further, neither is justification contractual, for the focus of both Reformers is christological and not contractual. Far from holding that faith justifies because it is the right kind of religious disposition to fulfill the human side of a contract with God, both insist that faith justifies because it grasps hold of Christ and unites the believer with him. Looking back to Luther and Calvin in this way points us forward to more satisfactory exegesis of the Pauline texts. Modern scholarship has often treated the forensic and the participatory as separate tracks in Paul's thought, but here they are appropriately integrated.

Conclusions

The relationship between the Reformers' exegesis and the contemporary task of Pauline interpretation cannot be conceived in any single or simple way but instead requires a critical sifting from which the following conclusions emerge:

(1) The Reformers' polemic against works-righteousness, while readily explicable in their own context, established trajectories of interpretation that unhelpfully distorted the perspective of scholarship on Second Temple Judaism. It therefore does not offer significant resources to contemporary interpreters.

(2) In some areas, contemporary scholars could better understand their own work and the historical influences on it by reflecting on the relationship between their own exegetical conclusions and those of the Reformers. Sometimes there is continued unacknowledged dependence (e.g., the nature of "the flesh"), sometimes intensification of one element of the Reformers' exegesis at the expense of others (e.g., the significance of covenant or the importance of emphasizing divine initiative in salvation), and sometimes simple misunderstanding (as in the treatment of the Reformers' supposed view of Paul's conscience).

(3) In other important respects, reflection on the Reformers' exegesis could help contemporary interpreters find fresh directions in their

research. The Reformers' multi-dimensional account of the nature of faith is of particular significance, as is the emphasis of Luther and Calvin in particular on faith's role in uniting the believer with Christ. The combining of this emphasis in their accounts of justification with an extrinsic focus addresses some of the principal deficiencies often identified in traditional Protestant discussions of the theme.

Book Reviews

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Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (IVP, 2015), 191 pages, $20.

In recent years, transgender ethics have been hotly debated among Christians, as public institutions and large franchise companies change policies and procedures to accommodate transgender individuals. As traditional understandings of gender identity are challenged, the church must wrestle with the theological conviction that humans are made in God's image as male and female, while also hearing the personal narratives of those whose experience does not fit neatly into these categories. Mark Yarhouse is a licensed clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at Regent University. In *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, he offers his theological, scientific, and clinical expertise to the church as it wrestles with questions about sexual identity.

Yarhouse first introduces the reader to relevant definitions and categories. Gender dysphoria is one of many different lived realities included under the broader transgender umbrella. It is included in the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the authoritative guide for mental health providers. The DSM-V describes those with gender dysphoria as those who "experience distress associated with the incongruence wherein one's psychological and emotional gender identity does not match one's biological sex" (quoted in Yarhouse, p. 20).

Yarhouse goes on to explore biblical texts that seem to support the

integrity and sacredness of gender identity corresponding to one's biological sex. He then presents additional passages from Scripture that offer counter-testimony and open the door to complexity and inclusivity. Yarhouse develops three distinct frameworks for the most common approaches to gender dysphoria: integrity, disability, and diversity. The integrity framework ascribes a sacredness to biological sex, which is therefore to be honored and upheld. The disability framework points to the complexity of a fallen world and sees gender dysphoria as a non-moral reality. In the diversity framework, gender identity is understood as a broad spectrum, and each diverse expression along this spectrum is to be respected and celebrated. In Yarhouse's view, each framework has something to commend it, and he advocates for an integrated framework that incorporates aspects of all three. His greatest difficulty comes from the diversity framework's deconstruction of gender. Even so he accepts a "weak" form, which he finds superior to the disability framework in its ability to answer questions of identity and meaning.

Yarhouse brings to this contested area a compassionate and reasoned voice that seeks to build a bridge between the evangelical church and those who experience gender dysphoria. Yarhouse uses Scripture to speak to experience, but he is comfortable letting experience inform his reading of Scripture as well. The author validates each person's experience, as he believes that gender identity is not a personal choice but a reality received. He calls Christians and churches to compassion, mercy, and inclusivity: regardless of how a person chooses to manage their gender dysphoria, the church should listen to that person's story and seek to understand their experience.

Understanding Gender Dysphoria is a good introduction to a complex issue, approached through both scientific and theological lenses. Yarhouse is clear that his scope is limited to gender dysphoria and does not address sexual orientation. Still, it would have been helpful if he had clarified how a Christian response to transgender individuals may or may not be the same as a Christian response to those who are gay. This book invites Christians to wrestle with realities of gender and to respond in humility and compassion. It would be an excellent reference for pastors and parents seeking to understand the complex decisions those with gender dysphoria must navigate.

TY GRIGG

Jack Lundbom, *On the Road to Siangyang: Covenant Mission in Mainland China 1890–1949* (Pickwick, 2015), 308 pages, $36.

The Evangelical Covenant Church's long legacy of overseas mission work may be unfamiliar to those new to the Covenant. After Alaska, China was the second field to which the ECC sent missionaries, beginning in 1890. For many decades, the work in China served as the model for how Covenant mission was done, setting the standard for subsequent missions established in new countries. With careful attention to the details of names, places, and dates, *On the Road to Siangyang* retraces the history of Covenant missions in China, as Lundbom offers a year-by-year account of the first sixty years.

The book's title refers to the location adopted by Covenant missionaries as their nucleus, in the central Chinese province of Hupeh (now Hubei), located on the main road west of Beijing. The city of Fancheng, located across the river from the political center of the Siangyang province, had been an outpost that Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission had unsuccessfully attempted to open over the previous three years. Through the persistence of early Covenant teachers, doctors, nurses, and missionary clergy, this area grew to include several churches, schools, and hospitals and a seminary that impacted thousands of Chinese believers and their communities.

The collected stories from Covenant missionaries will warm the hearts of many while also raising historiographical questions for some readers, such as, "What motivated the mission strategies chosen in those early days?" Here Lundbom gives us some tantalizing clues. Quoting Covenant historian Karl Olsson, he writes, "Covenant missionary work in China was broadly conceived. [Covenant mission founder Peter] Matson 'wanted a mission which through evangelism, education, and benevolence slowly spread the Gospel and the savor of Christ throughout an entire culture. It was the doctrine of leaven rather than of the bugle blast'" (p. 17). The leaven approached worked, in part due to the great difficulty of communicating back and forth with the Covenant offices in Chicago. We are told that four years passed before there was a single convert. These numbers, however, grew increasingly in the following years. There is no indication that mission directives came from the denominational home office in Chicago, implying a great deal of trust given by the Covenant to its missionaries, a tradition that persists to this day.

Those who read mission history today want to know what can be learned from the past. How are we building on the foundations of our

forebears in mission? Knowing how history was written in its day can give us some insights into what people were thinking when decisions were being made. Primary sources are critically important in reporting history fairly. Perhaps one of the most important documents Lundbom has included is medical missionary Oscar Anderson's firsthand report of his seventy-five days in captivity by rebel soldiers in 1931. Throughout the entire torturous account, Anderson's love for China, its beauty, and its people resounds to God's glory. Surely he represents the culturally sensitive, faith-filled position of many who gave their lives for this work.

The final section of the book traces Lundbom's later visits to China, which will be of interest to those familiar with the earlier stories. We can be grateful for this mission work and for the work of God that continues in the country of China. May we also be found faithful as we seek wisdom in the ways we participate in global service, wherever God is sending us today.

PAUL DE NEUI

Mark Safstrom, *Silliness and Stillness: A History of Covenant Point Bible Camp in Michigan's Upper Peninsula* (Covenant Point Bible Camp, 2017), 130 pages, $30.

Why does the Evangelical Covenant Church have so many Bible camps, and why do these camps play such a significant role in the denomination? Mark Safstrom's new history of Covenant Point Bible Camp helps answer these questions.

Weaving together themes from prior works on Pietism and Covenant history, Safstrom describes how and why the Upper Michigan Young People's Conference purchased property on Lake Hagerman in 1927 and held their first conference the following year. These young adults were heirs to the Mission Friends' tradition of gathering outdoors in the summertime for a week or two of preaching, singing, Bible study, and "wholesome recreation" (p. 17). Safstrom writes, "The tradition of holding revivals in the summer, with the long days, glorious weather, and picnics with friends amplified the euphoria of the spiritual experiences that people were otherwise gaining from the meetings and singing. This fun factor is not to be discounted as a key emotional aspect of the success of summer camping in supporting the general ministry of revival" (p. 61).

In his history, Safstrom traces the subsequent construction of the camp's buildings (the Tabernacle, dorms, cabins, dining hall), the develop-

ment of its programs, and the additions of youth and family camps. He summarizes these and other changes in the camp program and facilities, "If the Covenant Church was going to be able to retain the second and third generations, they would need to be allowed freedom to develop new forms of summer programming" (p. 14). Safstrom also describes Covenant Point's 1961 adoption into the Central Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church and its implications for partnering with Covenant Harbor Bible Camp. With a decline in attendance at youth camp in the 1970s, leaders at Covenant Point began new initiatives, turning Covenant Point into a year-round Bible camp and retreat center through the 1978–1979 "Master Plan."

Safstrom demonstrates that Covenant camps originated with the primary purpose of conversion ("revival") but were also devoted to the deepening of commitments made to Jesus Christ ("catechism"). He observes, "The core purpose of Bible camp is to present the gospel, yet specifically what this means and how it is accomplished has a long history of development" (p. 64). Safstrom notes how the understanding of conversion has expanded at Covenant Point, especially in the past few decades. "Celebrating Conversion: A Resource for Christian Camps" is included in the text as an appendix. Written by Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom (professor of theology at North Park Theological Seminary) and Erik Strom (ordained Covenant pastor and director of Covenant Point) for the Association of Covenant Camps and Conference Centers, this 2013 document provides an historical and biblical framework for understanding conversion in the Covenant tradition. Safstrom's chapter on conversion ("The Philosophy of Camping Ministry") deserves a reading by a wide audience.

Silliness and Stillness is a fine book by an academic historian whose background makes him uniquely qualified to tell the story of Covenant Point. Safstrom, assistant professor of Scandinavian studies at Augustana College, served on staff at Covenant Point and has written extensively about the larger context of Covenant history. Book designer Sandy Nelson did admirable work in this attractive, photo-filled volume. Those with connections to Covenant Point will likely recognize the faces of campers and staff from across the decades. In viewing the photos, the "silliness" referenced in the book's title becomes evident.

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